

MANSON:

A lingering evil

Bugliosi recalls the
dark days of 1969



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Mastermind of the murders of Sharon Tate and others, Charles Manson, behind bars at San Quentin, has been denied parole seven times.

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By Bob Groves

Herald Examiner staff writer.

He spends his days chasing the ghost of one killer while being haunted by the notoriety of another.

Vincent Bugliosi wants to rewrite history — but he can't escape his own celebrated past.

Because whatever else he does, Bugliosi (pronounced "Bool-yo-see") will probably always be remembered as the former L.A. County prosecutor who convicted Charles Manson for masterminding the grisly murders of pregnant actress Sharon Tate and eight others, 20 years ago this week.

In the 15 years since writing the book "Helter Skelter" about the 1969 Manson murders and the 1971 trial, Bugliosi has switched from being a prosecutor to a defense lawyer; and from writing non-fiction books to novels — and back again.

Since participating in a posthumous mock trial of Lee Harvey Oswald on British TV in 1986, Bugliosi has spent hundreds of hours researching thousands of official documents for a book he says will prove conclusively to



Actress Sharon Tate was eight months pregnant when she was murdered by Manson followers 20 years ago this week.

"the conspiracy buffs" that the slain assassin acted alone in killing John F. Kennedy.

"I view it as the most important book I've written," Bugliosi,

54, says of his as-yet-untitled tome. "The Manson book was important, but it didn't alter history."

Yet it is the public's fascination with Manson — not Oswald — that made Bugliosi famous and dogs him to this day. Every day, Bugliosi says, someone in a store — or a long-distance operator recognizing his name — will stop him and ask about Manson.

Manson, who is the same age as Bugliosi, is serving a life sentence in San Quentin. Their only contact has been two letters from Manson, one of which, Bugliosi says, contained a veiled death threat. Bugliosi hasn't seen him in person since 1971; yet Manson lurks in his life like an evil twin.

"There's no way I can really separate myself from Manson," says Bugliosi, a wiry, intense man given to bursts of infectious laughter. "It's like trying to get away from your own shadow. It's pretty tough to do."

Why has Manson — more than other mass murderers such as Richard Speck or Juan Corona — achieved the almost mythic reputation of a Jack the Ripper?

"One of the reasons," Bugliosi

Bugliosi, C-4 ►

Bugliosi

► From C-1

speculates, "is the extreme bizarreness of the case. Here's this little goon, 5-foot-2 — though he gives the sense of being taller ... Here's this little guy, and his followers — and ultimately killers — were kids from average American homes."

While someone such as Ted Bundy may have murdered more victims, "Manson sat back pulling strings and getting other people to go kill strangers without asking questions. ... When people come up and ask me about Manson, they don't ask how many times someone was stabbed, they ask, how did he control these people?"

"When I was first assigned to the case, it was called the Tate case. Then Manson comes on the scene, and he's so bizarre and, in his own way, charismatic, that he upstaged the victims, and it became the Manson case."

In the summer of '69, manipulative ex-con Manson and his roving band of middle-class misfits lived at the remote Spahn movie ranch north of Los Angeles, and later in Death Valley. Here they prepared for what Manson predicted would be a racial Armageddon he called "Helter Skelter" after one of several current Beatles hits in which he found warped, apocalyptic "messages."

On Aug. 8, 1969, Manson sent four young members of his "family" to a house at 10050 Cielo Drive off Benedict Canyon. There, in the early hours of Aug. 9, they brutally stabbed to death blond actress Tate — the 26-year-old wife of director Roman Polanski, who was away in London — and her unborn baby of eight months. They also killed leading Hollywood hairdresser Jay Sebr-

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ing, coffee heiress Abigail Folger and her lover Voytek Frykowski, and teen-ager Steven Parent, who had stopped by to buy a stereo from the house's caretaker.

The following night, another Manson death squad murdered wealthy Los Feliz grocer Leno LaBianca, 44, and his wife, Rosemary, 38. The hideous crimes were marked by vicious multiple stabbings and cryptic slogans — "Death to Pigs" and "Rise" — scrawled on the walls in the victims' blood. The murders — the "family" later claimed to have committed dozens more — panicked Hollywood, and confirmed mainstream America's worst fears about the sex, drugs and rock 'n' roll of the hippie '60s.

"He's not a dumb guy," Bugliosi says of Manson. "He sounds

crazy, speaking in riddles. But it's not easy to speak in an enigmatic way and have a message underneath. And he's not insane. His values are abnormal, but in my opinion, Manson knows exactly what he's doing."

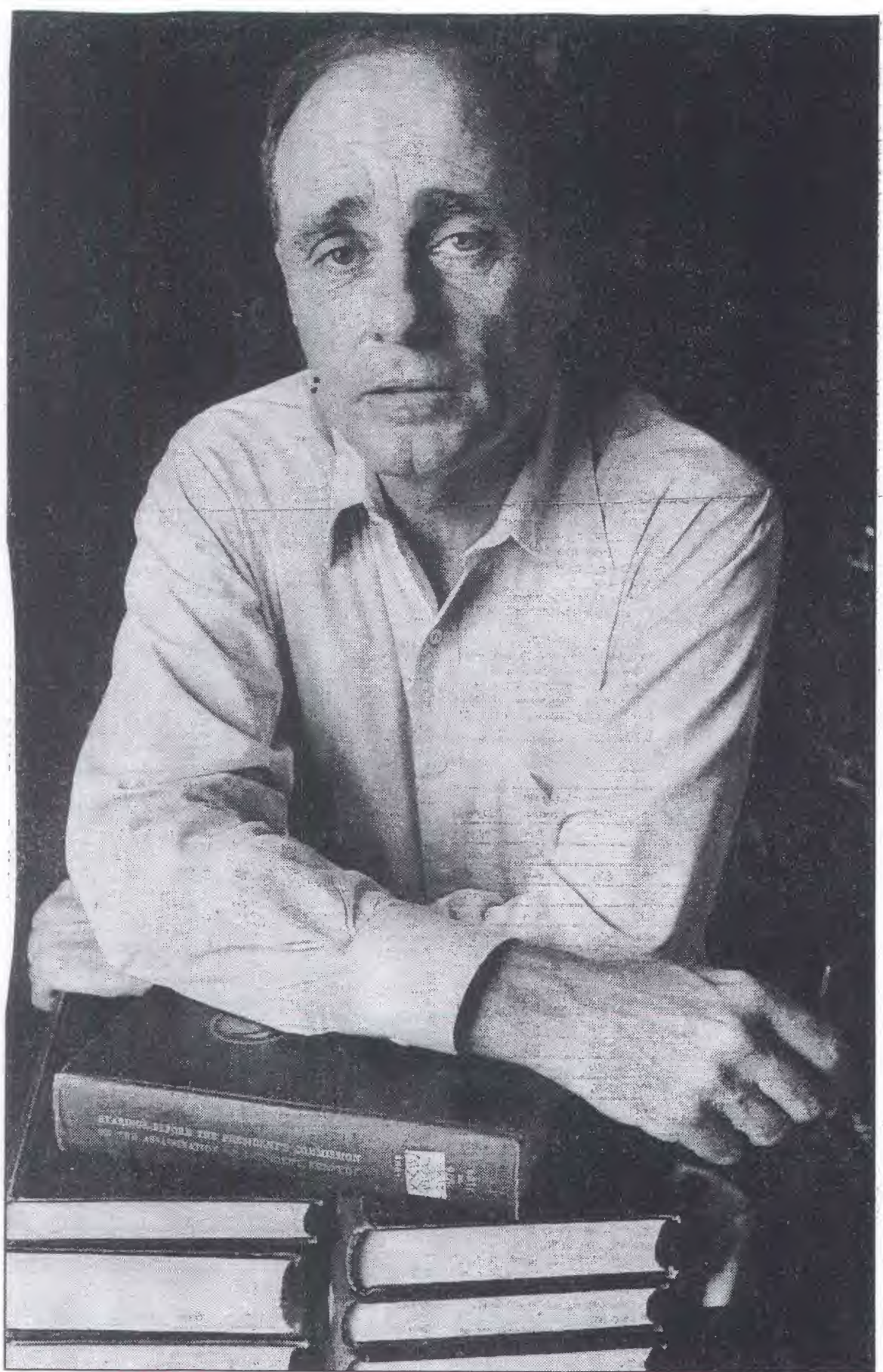
Manson's "evil genius," according to Bugliosi, was his "ability to detect weaknesses and fears in people and exploit them." Using isolation, LSD, philosophical gibberish and sexual perversion, the man known variously as "Jesus," "God," "Soul" and "Satan" controlled his followers and "reached into their psyches to go after their convictions."

Manson has been rejected seven times by his parole board. Bugliosi believes he will never be released from prison.

Bugliosi, meanwhile, collaborates on more books, one of which he recently sold for a record \$1 million-plus to TV. Occasionally he defends murder suspects, but only if convinced of their innocence. One such case he is recounting in "And the Sea Will Tell," a new book about a San Diego yachting couple murdered in 1974 on a South Seas island.

He also continues to plow through all 26 volumes of the Warren Commission Report — and 12 volumes of the House Select Committee report — on the Kennedy assassination.

As for Manson, "I never bring the case up — never." Bugliosi pauses. "I shouldn't say never; but extremely rarely. Because people always ask about it."



Javier Mendoza/Herald Examiner

Famous for his successful prosecution of Charles Manson, Vincent Bugliosi is now working on a book that he says will prove Lee Harvey Oswald acted alone in the John F. Kennedy assassination.